

**Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate**

**Remarks by Elliott Abrams, President, Ethics & Public Policy Center
on PNTR for China
July 18, 2000**

Mr Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you very much for inviting me to testify today.

There is but one argument I wish to make to the Committee today, and it is this: the national security threat posed by China and the human rights situation in China are two sides of the same coin. As President Reagan reminded the students at Moscow State University when he spoke there in 1988 "People do not make wars, governments do." Our concern in China is not with the nation or the people, but with the regime. And until that regime changes, the threat posed by China will not change fundamentally.

This is a simple point, but one we very often ignore. We call forgetting about human rights a form of "realism." We view a concern with human rights as a luxury that we can least afford when facing a powerful dictatorship. But that is just the occasion when human rights *most* deserves our attention. Donald Kagan of Yale University, in his book *On The Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace*, explained why: "In states where there is direct or representative democracy it is not possible to exclude issues of morality...from consideration, for that is how the ordinary citizen thinks about affairs, both foreign and domestic, and the politicians cannot afford to ignore their feelings." Democracy is itself a safeguard against aggression. Conversely, the dictatorial regime is always illegitimate, and any system that has no peaceful means to legitimize its leaders is inherently unstable. Those leaders will always be tempted to use foreign adventures as a means of boosting nationalism-- and sustaining their own popularity.

President Reagan, whom I served as Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, stated this plainly in his speech to the U.N. General Assembly on September 22, 1986: "Respect for human rights is not social work; it is not merely an act of compassion. It is the first obligation of government and the source of its legitimacy. It is also the foundation stone in any structure of world peace. All through history, it has been the dictatorships and the tyrannies that have surrendered first to the cult of militarism and the pursuit of war. Countries based on the consent of the governed, countries that recognize the unalienable rights of the individual, do not make war on each other."

Now that last claim has been subjected to analysis by political scientists and no doubt they have been able to find some partial exceptions. But the insight stands: there is a powerful link between a country's internal arrangements and its and external affairs, and we ignore that link at our peril.

China is not an exception to the rule. Today the regime in Beijing is ideologically bankrupt. I doubt that there are ten convinced communists remaining in Beijing. The regime tries to legitimize its power through economic progress (progress which in turn further undercuts its own ideological legitimacy), and through an assertive foreign policy. As the Soviet Union did, it tries, by demonstrating its might and its growing power on the world scene, both to stoke nationalistic feelings at home and to deter any potential domestic opposition. Shows of force, massive increases in spending on military power, threats against Taiwan, are examples, intended for a domestic as much as a foreign audience. A democratic government in Beijing, trying to win the next elections, would be forced to show the people that it will not undertake risky foreign adventures and will not waste money on excessive military spending. The present regime, reeling from its own sense of illegitimacy, instead uses military matters to shore up its hold on power. Threats against Taiwan are the foreign side of the crackdown on Falun Gong: two sides of the same coin again. Force as a substitute for consent, legitimacy, and respect for human rights.

I therefore hope that the Committee will keep human rights questions very much in mind when thinking about the security challenge presented by China. There is a strong link between that regime's domestic and foreign policies. Trade deals that enhance the regime's power without furthering the cause of human rights increase the danger to us. Political reform in China ultimately lessens the danger to us. Our security problem arises from the fact that political reform is likely to be a slow and lengthy process, so that in the short run the regime gets richer and more powerful— and may divert those resources toward its military. Put another way, if more trade leads to economic change and wealth, and undercuts the legitimacy of the regime while increasing the resources available to it, isn't it logical to think they will use those resources in a desperate effort to stay in power?

As the gap grows between China's freer and freer economy and its communist political arrangements, the possibility of a real confrontation grows with it. And that is why I believe we must— as a national security matter— promote political reform and respect for human rights in China just as strongly as we promote trade and economic reform. As President Reagan put it, this is not social work; it is a critical national security issue.

Thank you again for the honor of appearing before the Committee today.